

RESTRICTED — Not to be released outside the General Accounting Office without the approval of the Director of Legislative Liaison, a restriction which is kept by the Distribution Section, Publications Branch, GAO

090736

264.21

COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20546



RELEASED

72-0528

MAY 9 1972

1  
36

B-115398

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In this letter we are providing answers to the questions you asked in your letter of March 31, 1972. We hope these answers will clarify the record on the Joint Committee's March 1 hearings on implementation of sections 201, 202, and 203 of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970.

1. Question: What is GAO's timetable for delivering its definition of Congressional information needs and requirements to OMB and Treasury? Has OMB developed procedures for incorporating Congressional needs and requirements as these are communicated to them by GAO? Have the agencies involved agreed on a continuing exchange of documentation to insure that GAO's survey schedule will not delay OMB and Treasury?

Answers: GAO delivered its preliminary description of the congressional needs on February 17, 1972, to all members of Congress and committees. We have received responses from most committees and are drafting a final report on congressional needs to be delivered by June 30, 1972. The final report will, in a general way, describe the types of information the committees and members expect from the OMB-Treasury system.

As we see our job, it does not stop there. We plan to perform two more tasks. First, we plan to provide OMB and Treasury with greater detail on what information the committees and members want. For instance, our current report would indicate that committees and members want to know such information as how much is budgeted for and spent on mapping by the several Federal agencies which perform or finance such work.

In the next phase of our work, we will consult with the committee staffs to determine such things as the frequency with which such information is needed, the extent of detail needed, and the preferred method of displaying the information. We plan to do this for each major subject area. Second, we plan to work with OMB and Treasury to

904234  
090736

match their information systems' capabilities with the needs of the committees and members to see whether these needs will be met by the system and to suggest needed revisions and additions. We expect that some of the needs will be met by OMB's and Treasury's systems, some will be met by agency data processing systems, and some will be met by special studies or specially prepared reports. As we see it, some of the needs can be met fairly soon from existing systems and data files, whereas others will require extensive system development. We expect that it will take about 18 months to complete our work in getting all the necessary details on the needs of the Congress from all the committees.

As we complete segments of our work, we will turn them over to OMB and Treasury. We are working with them on establishing procedures for exchanging the necessary documentation.

2. Question: In GAO's opinion, must detailed Congressional information requirements be available before significant progress can be made within the Executive Branch on implementation of Sections 201-203? Are the information areas presented in GAO's February 17 report sufficiently detailed for OMB and Treasury to initiate preliminary development plans? What, in GAO's view, should such plans include?

Answers: Detailed congressional information requirements do not have to be made available before significant progress can be made. We believe that the general information needs described in our February 17 report do provide a sufficient base upon which OMB and Treasury can initiate the development of standard classifications and system concepts. For example, we identified the basic data elements needed for each Federal program or project. (See enclosure representing an excerpt from our report.) To satisfy this need there will have to be a standard way of identifying programs and projects and standard definitions and codes for each of the data elements.

Another example is the strong need for information on geographic impact of Federal actions. We recognize that this

is a very complex problem that has been addressed in the past. It should be addressed again, however, so that a current assessment of costs and benefits of the alternative means of deriving geographic impact information can be made.

The preliminary development plan should include:

- Specific assignment of responsibilities to staffs in GAO, OMB, Treasury, and appropriate agencies.
- A schedule of regular meetings and working sessions.
- A schedule for briefing and reporting to senior management in GAO, OMB, and Treasury.
- Procedures for the systematic exchange of documentation on information users' requirements and systems development.
- A milestone schedule which reflects the interdependence of the task being performed by GAO and the Congress, OMB and Treasury, and the Federal agencies.

3. Question: Is it anticipated that there will be major changes in the findings contained in the February 17 GAO report as a result of follow-up interviews with committees? How are the needs of committees not covered in this report-- for example, the House Appropriations Committee--to be incorporated in future documentation for use by the systems developers?

Answers: In our letter transmitting our February 17 report to the members and committees, we requested comments. These comments will be reflected in a final report on congressional needs which, as stated before, we plan to issue by June 30, 1972. On the basis of the comments received so far and on our experience, we do not believe that there will be any changes in the general information categories presented in our report.

C3  
In our initial survey, we did not interview the House Committee on Appropriations or the Joint Committee on Reduction of Federal Expenditures because of their busy schedules during the period we made the survey. We have initiated discussions with the staffs of these committees, and we will incorporate their needs into our subsequent reports. We do not expect their needs to alter those already identified; they may add to the detailed requirements, and they may add another major category. In any event, their requirements will be documented and reported to the executive branch along with all other committees.

4. Question: Can GAO anticipate Executive Branch planning and development efforts, to some extent, so that work in the interests of Congressional users can be put on a relatively firm schedule? What is the status of planning, within GAO, for Congressional access to and use of data which will be available eventually in a government-wide system? Have GAO and OMB-Treasury begun discussing alternative arrangements for Congressional access to the system?

Answers: The determination of congressional requirements by GAO and the development of reporting systems to meet those requirements by OMB and Treasury are two interdependent processes. In the early stages, the lead process is the users' requirements determination by GAO. Then the lead will shift to the executive branch system developers, with the GAO user representatives reviewing the products of the system developers with the congressional committees and suggesting changes. GAO can maintain a relatively firm schedule for determining user requirements; we cannot anticipate the schedule for the development efforts by the executive branch.

The planning and arrangements for congressional access and use of data from the executive branch systems are subjects that have been discussed widely by GAO, OMB, and Treasury but not yet seriously addressed in a formal way leading to detailed agreement on procedures. We plan to work out proposed agreements and procedures as a part of our determination

of requirements and cooperation with the executive branch. We also recognize that some of the needed data will have to be processed by the legislative branch; we intend to work with all data processing groups in the legislative branch. Further, we recognize that, to satisfy the needs identified in our report, some data must come from the Congress itself, such as the status of authorizing and appropriating legislation. We plan to work with the Senate and House system development staffs to encourage compatibility among systems and to work out plans and procedures for the reporting of this data to the executive branch.

5. Question: In GAO's opinion, has the necessary commitment and priority been demonstrated within the Executive Branch on standardization efforts over the past year, as reflected by OMB-Treasury staff size and budget allocations? Is the present part-time staff commitment by OMB and Treasury consistent with the intent to establish a government-wide system as rapidly as possible? What future staffing and related administrative arrangements does GAO recommend to insure effective development and management of this project within the Executive Branch?

Answers: We believe that a higher priority and greater commitment will be needed than has been made so far, if we are to make significant progress in standardization in the next few years. Although both OMB and Treasury have sizable staffs working on their own data processing systems, the systems planning on a combined OMB/Treasury/Agency basis that will be needed to meet congressional needs is being performed by ad hoc task groups. The part-time task group approach has been very slow in producing tangible results. We feel that full-time staffs are much more productive. These staffs may be drawn from agencies into task groups; however, when they are still responsible for their regular jobs, the task group work takes a lower priority. We suggest that the work under sections 201, 202, and 203 be identified as a major project by OMB and Treasury and that resources be specifically identified with the project in budgeting and managing.

6. Question: Provide for the record a list of the positions, grades, titles and percentages of time of GAO personnel presently devoted to implementation of Sections 201-203. What is your estimate at this time of the increases in staff required for this work over the next five years?

Answer:

<u>Position/title</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Percent of time</u>
Director, Financial and General Management Studies Division	GS-17	15
Deputy Director for Financial Management	GS-17	10
Deputy Director for ADP	GS-17	10
Assistant Director for ADP	GS-15	90
Supervisory Accountant	GS-14	100
Management Analyst	GS-14	100
Management Analyst	GS-13	100
Supervisory Accountant	GS-13	90
Supervisory Accountant	GS-12	100
Supervisory Accountant	GS-11	100
Computer Specialist	GS-9	100
Secretary	GS-5	100
Secretary	GS-4	100

In addition, a professor on a fellowship will be assisting this staff for 3 to 6 months.

Estimates of needed increases in this staff are difficult to make. We do expect that the overall percentage of our staff involved in direct assistance to the Congress will continue to increase. This has been reflected in our budget request. The number of people assigned to the direct ADP support will depend

B-115398

upon the nature of the requests we receive and the extent and complexity of the requirements study. This is one of our highest priority projects, and we plan to devote sufficient resources to do the job effectively.

Sincerely yours,



Comptroller General  
of the United States

Enclosure

The Honorable Jack Brooks  
Chairman, Joint Committee  
on Congressional Operations  
Congress of the United States

CI  
R

TNT 00300

EXCERPT FROM THE REPORT OF  
THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL  
OF THE UNITED STATES

ON

BUDGETARY AND FISCAL INFORMATION  
NEEDS OF THE CONGRESS B-115398  
February 17, 1972

Basic financial information

The Congress needs the following basic financial information for each Federal program or project. (See app. IV for a description of the Federal financial cycle which forms the conceptual framework for this description.)

- The budget amounts requested by the Federal agency.
- The amounts requested in the President's budget.
- References to authorizing legislation.
- The amounts authorized.
- The estimated 5-year costs.
- References to appropriating legislation.
- The amounts appropriated.
- The amounts of all other types of budget authority, including contract authority, authorizations to spend debt receipts, reappropriations, reauthorizations, loan authority, and supplemental budget authority.
- The amounts apportioned by the Office of Management and Budget.
- The amounts impounded by executive branch action.
- The amounts obligated by the Federal agency.
- The amounts expended (cash bases) or loaned by the Federal agency.

- The amounts transferred among Federal agencies.
- The amounts reprogrammed.
- The amounts of funds not used.

Each of the foregoing amounts should be identified by the dates of action and the time periods covered.

Classification structures for aggregating  
basic financial information

The Congress needs to have basic financial information related to Federal programs and projects in a form readily adaptable for congressional use. Hence the basic financial information must be aggregated, accumulated, or summarized by programs or projects within several classification structures on the basis of the following congressional user patterns identified in our survey.

- Authorizing and appropriating legislation and responsible congressional committees.
- Responsible Federal Government organizations.
- Federal program and project objectives or subject areas.
- Political subdivisions.
- Rural and urban areas.
- Target groups.

These congressional user patterns are the foundation upon which the classification structures are to be developed.